

Tech-check-tech

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Regulation set to take effect tomorrow, Jan. 5, 2007, is designed to reduce medication errors in California hospitals and free pharmacists for greater involvement in direct patient care rather than in non-discretionary (clerical) tasks. The new regulation will allow general acute care hospitals to employ specially trained pharmacy technicians to check medication cassettes and the work of other technicians, thereby freeing pharmacists to expand their role in patient care areas to ensure the safety of the medication use process.

Research studies led by Cedars-Sinai Medical Center and the University of California, San Francisco School of Pharmacy played a key role in the decision to approve this regulation. The results of the first "tech-check-tech" study, which were published in the American Journal of Healthy-System Pharmacy in 2002, demonstrated the safety of having specially-trained technicians check the work of other technicians to prevent medication errors. The research was conducted at Cedars-Sinai and at Long Beach Memorial Medical Center. The second study, just completed, demonstrated the impact of pharmacists on preventing medication errors during the time that they would otherwise have been performing non-discretionary tasks.

Historically, any function performed by a pharmacy technician relative to dispensing a prescription had to be verified and documented in writing by a pharmacist, but the new regulation will enable hospital pharmacists to devote their time to activities designed to reduce errors, such as working with physicians and nurses to evaluate medications and ensure the absence of allergies, drug interactions, or patient conditions that would be of concern.

According to Rita Shane, Pharm. D., director of Pharmacy Services at Cedars-Sinai and one of the principal investigators on the study, "A number of studies have demonstrated the value of pharmacists in reducing adverse drug events in the hospital setting. One study showed that hospitals

with pharmacists in patient care areas had a 45 percent decrease in medication errors overall and a 94 percent decrease in medication errors that adversely impacted patient outcomes.

"This regulation will have a significant positive impact on the practice of pharmacy in California by enabling pharmacists to spend more time in direct patient care activities designed to improve medication safety," said Shane. "Hopefully, this will assist other states who are considering allowing technicians to check medication cassettes as well."

Source: Cedars-Sinai Medical Center

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